Chinese Medicine and the Eyes

Heart element is the only one that has four meridians associated with it. Triple-burner pericardium and heart small intestine. So what happens, and this isn't the whole course, I actually teach a whole course in Chinese medicine at the acupuncture school, but this isn't a course in Chinese medicine, but we look at all these different elements and where those imbalances are and different parts of the eye relate to different elements.

A lot of times we're treating dry eye. And as an optometrist or an ophthalmologist, we might do rastasis or Zydra or different steroids. And we might do warm compresses and eye drops.

But in Chinese medicine, the spleen is the upper lid, the stomach is the lower lid. And as a neuro-ophthalmologist, and as I talked before, we know about the gut-brain connection.

There's a gut-eye connection. So sometimes we have digestive issues that are the underlying pattern that are affecting the dry eye. Welcome to the IQ Podcast.

I'm Dr.

Podcast Introduction and Summit Overview

Ronni Banek, here to help you boost your IQ with powerful insights that connect your eyes, your brain, and your whole body wellness. This episode was recorded during the iHealth Summit, where the world's leading experts shared breakthrough insights in vision and holistic eye care.

Can traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture help to support your eyes? What do liver health, energy flow, and your emotions have to do with your vision?

And finally, could ancient Eastern healing techniques be the missing link in your eye health journey? Join us for this eye-opening discussion with our next expert, Dr.

Mark Grossman, as we explore the power of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture for lifelong vision wellness. This is one you don't want to miss.

Stay tuned. Hello, I'm Dr. Rani and I'm here to talk about something we often take for granted, our vision. In my book, Beyond Carrots, Best Foods for Eye Health A-Z, I delve into how crucial it is to be proactive about your vision health.

Certain eye issues are quite common, such as dry eye and eye strain, while others frequently develop with age like cataracts, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma.

Some of these types of eye conditions can be debilitating and even lead to loss of vision. The good news is that many of these sight-stealing conditions are preventable if you take the right steps.

Your eyes are precious and they deserve the best care possible. To ensure healthy vision for life, you need to provide your eyes with the proper nutrition they need.

Nutrients like lutein, theaxanthin, and bioflavonoids, also omega fatty acids, are like fuel for your eyes, keeping them strong and vibrant. But here's the truth, sometimes our diets have gaps.

That's where my age-size supplement bundle comes in.

Eye Health, Nutrition, and Supplement Promotion

It's the result of years of research and my passion for eye health. The age-size bundle contains the three essential supplements I recommend to my patients.

Let's start with Fortify, a blend of powerful ingredients that protect against stressors like blue and UV light, eye strain, free radicals, and oxidative stress.

Next is Nourish, a complete multivitamin. Nourish provides the foundational building blocks your eyes need for cellular function and repair, along with powerful bioflavonoids that support the delicate structures within your eyes.

And then there's Soothe, a unique complete blend of omegas, three, six, seven, and nine. This blend of omega supports a healthy inflammatory response, nourishes dry eye, and helps fight against macular degeneration.

Remember, taking care of your eyes isn't just about today, it's an investment in your future. By being proactive now, you can enjoy healthy vision for years to come so you can continue reading, using a device, staying independent, and seeing the faces of your loved ones.

So, join me in taking the first step towards a lifetime of clear, vibrant vision. It's time to introduce your eyes to the Ageless Eyes Bundle. I invite you to learn more on my website about each of the powerful supplements that make up the trio in the Ageless Eyes Bundle.

Let's embark on this journey together because your eyes deserve nothing but the best. The Ageless Eyes Bundle. See the world with clarity and confidence.

Welcome to the Eye Health Summit. Today, I'm thrilled to have Dr. Mark Grossman join me for an enlightening conversation on traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture for eye health.

Dr. Grossman is a renowned optometrist and licensed acupuncturist with over 40 years of experience integrating Western and Eastern approaches to eye care.

Dr. Grossman is truly a pioneer in using traditional Chinese medicine or TCM to support vision health. And he's co-authored several books, including Natural Eye Care, a comprehensive manual for practitioners of oriental medicine.

Thank you so much, Dr. Grossman, for joining us for the Eye Health Summit. Thank you so much, Dr. Banach, and great gratitude for you putting this all together.

So I'm all ready to answer any questions you might have. Excellent. That's what we're here for, right? To help people get better vision and maintain healthy vision.

So I'm so glad you could join us and share your expertise because you have a really unique background. And I want to start off by asking you about that background.

How have you, as an optometrist, how did you get interested in traditional Chinese medicine or was it vice versa? Were you practicing already? And then you went into the field of optometry.

No, okay. I grew up in New York City and I went, you know how certain times in life signs come to you that this is going to be your soul's journey of what you need to be in life to be in service to others.

I grew up in New York City and I went to a high school called Stuyvesant High School, which was a math and science high school. And I was always interested in meditation and Eastern approaches to medicine.

But those things were not available in New York and a way to study it. So when I went to college, I got the sign that I was supposed to be an optometrist.

Now, why was I supposed to be an optometrist? I was getting my ankle taped. I was playing on the basketball team. And I asked the, and I can remember it like it was yesterday.

I asked the trainer, and he said, what are you doing next year? He goes, I'm going to optometry school. You don't make a lot of money, you make enough money, but nobody dies on you.

I said, great. I don't want anybody dying on me. I would never get too emotionally involved in my patients. But he said, you have to be good in math and science.

I said, I can do that. So I took the journey, and I was so dedicated to become an optometrist.

Dr. Grossmanu2019s Background and Path to Chinese Medicine

And then, again, the sign came 15, 16 years later. I finally paid off my loans for optometry school. And there, in my friend's living room, was one of the first books on Chinese medicine.

It was The Web That Has No Weaver. And just like I got that sign that I was supposed to be an optometrist, the book looked at me. I looked at the book and I said, oh my God, I got to study Chinese medicine now.

But it was not licensed in New York yet. called up my friend, he goes, guess what? It's gonna be licensed next year. So if you go to school in Connecticut, we're moving it to New York City, you'll be one of the first licensed acupuncturists in New York State.

I said, I don't know why I'm going, but I'm going. So I went three to four years to do the full program in Chinese medicine. And you know what it did?

It changed my whole outlook on medicine. It answered many of the questions that we couldn't answer in regular optometry school. Why did the right eye get worse than the left eye?

Why did that cataract develop in the right eye before the left eye? Why did they get macular degeneration in this eye and at this age? It answered the question of Why?

You took what was happening around you and you let yourself open up to all these possibilities, exploring first studying optometry, then studying this area that wasn't even available to you in your state.

I think sometimes we have to listen to the universe and the signs that the universe sends us to allow growth and really to find our own true journey in this world, like what we were meant to do.

So I can definitely tell you have this a passion for this area. Now I wanted to ask you about traditional Chinese medicine. I have a very limited understanding of it, but I understand that organs are sometimes connected to each other.

So how are the eyes viewed in traditional Chinese medicine? Are there specific organs that the eyes are connected to? The beauty, the artistry of Chinese medicine is that just in In regular medicine, and this is from the book that has no web that has no weaver, we look at how does X cause Y?

In Chinese medicine, we look at what is the relationship between X and Y. And I believe in my soul that all disease, dis-ease in the body-mind has to do with relationships to the stars, to the sky, to the mountains, to our families.

And when we have imbalance in relationships, we have in Chinese medicine patterns of disharmony. And the patterns of disharmony is what we treat. We don't treat macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts.

We treat the person behind the eyes. So in Chinese medicine, and this is what's really cool, all the meridians, there's 12 meridians, all the meridians go to the eyes.

All the meridians go through the heart. So there's a heart-eye connection. Just as you, as a neuro-optimologist, and I'll get into that later because I'm so excited that you're doing this, sorry, is the fact that embryologically, physiologically, neurologically, what is the eye?

It is brain tissue. We don't see with our eyes. Our eyes are tools for the mind. So if we believe in the neuroplasticity of the brain, which science has shown, then we have neuroplasticity of the eye.

If we treat the patterns behind the eye problems, then the eye problem can get better along with other things in the body. So we treat patterns of disharmony imbalances, and then when we see what happens.

Now, are there specific meridians or organ systems that relate more to eyes? Yes. In Chinese medicine, the liver, the wood element, the liver gallbladder opens up to the eyes.

So in most of my treatments, as you can see, are all those acupuncture charts behind me. There's usually some liver points, but all five elements relate to the eyes.

What are some of the other elements?

How Chinese Medicine Views the Eyes

Because this is all new to me, I'm sure to many other people who are listening as well. What are the elements that are oftentimes referred to in traditional Chinese medicine?

We've got the water element. The water element is made of kidney, which is the yin, and the bladder, which is the yang. So the water element is one of the elements.

And then there's cycles and patterns. Wood element, liver, gallbladder. Earth element, spleen, stomach. Metal element, lung, large intestine. Heart element is the only one that has four meridians associated with it.

Triple burner pericardium and heart, small intestine. So what happens, and this isn't the whole course, I actually teach a whole course in Chinese medicine at the acupuncture school, but this isn't a course in Chinese medicine, but we look at all these different elements and where those imbalances are and different parts of the eye relate to different elements.

A lot of times we're treating dry eye. And as an optometrist or an ophthalmologist, we might do rastasis or Zydra or different steroids. And we might do warm compresses and eye drops.

But in Chinese medicine, the spleen is the upper lid. The stomach is the lower lid. And as a neuro-ophthalmologist, and as I talked before, we know about the gut-brain connection.

There's a gut-eye connection. So sometimes we have digestive issues that are the underlying pattern that are affecting the dry eye. So do I do all the other things like we learned traditionally in optometry and ophthalmology school?

Absolutely. Are we going to avoid looking at the gut? Are we going to avoid looking at other things? And again, anything that's good for circulation, oxidative stress, inflammation, dementia, Alzheimer's, glucose levels, all these things affect the eyes.

It's so interesting as I'm hearing you speak about all the meridians and the elements and how imbalances can lead to eye issues. So I practice neuroophthalmology, but I also practice functional medicine, which is a very similar kind of approach where we think about balances between different organ systems.

So sometimes there can be imbalances in the gut that lead to certain eye issues and may contribute to certain eye issues. or sometimes it's within the endocrine system where our hormones are off balance.

I'm in totally agreement with you in that the eye is not an isolated organ. It is intimately connected with almost every other organ system in the body.

No, don't just treat the eye problem. I also agree that you have to treat where the problem is coming from. So take a few steps back. And we call it in functional medicine, we call it root cause we call this drug root cause medicine.

So I'm assuming it's very similar to what you're doing in traditional Chinese medicine, looking at where the problems stemming from rather than just putting a bandaid on the problem with Like you mentioned the example of dry eyes, a prescription drop or warm compresses.

Don't just put a bandaid on the problem. Find out where it's coming from and try to approach it from that lens. I wanted to shift a little bit now and talk a little bit about acupuncture for eye health because a lot of my patients oftentimes ask me, Dr.

Banik, can I get acupuncture? for macular degeneration or for glaucoma or other optic nerve issues. What are your responses to that? How do you use acupuncture in your practice for vision health?

It's very interesting. Like you said in the bio, I've been doing this for 45 years now. And right now I'm doing more telemedicine and in direct eye health and only seeing patients in person.

once every six weeks for eye health, but I'm doing acupuncture once or twice a week. And acupuncture for eye health in terms of macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, dry eyes, again, I'm using that very all the time.

Now there's specific treatments for it. There's one treatment out of Denmark specifically for macular degeneration called micro acupuncture where we put a lot of specific needles in the hands and the feet and around the eyes.

Glaucoma, we're also looking, again, as we know, there's many different kinds of glaucoma. There's open angle glaucoma, narrow angle glaucoma, pigmentary glaucoma, pseudo exfoliation glaucoma.

So depending on the type of glaucoma, and again, Where is it coming from? Is it more of a liver pattern of disharmony? Is it more of emotional, psychological?

Again, we treat the body, mind and spirit. So a lot of times I have so many stories of patients.

Meridians, Elements, and Dry Eye Patterns

Why did they, like I said before, why in Chinese medicine, the right eye is more the male father eye. The left eye is more the mother, yin, feminine eye.

So what happens when we see macular degeneration in a 58-year-old, 59-year-old woman in the right eye? Huh, why did they develop that? in traditional Western medicine, we're gonna look, we might do injections.

I work with retinal specialists all the time, but acupuncture can be used as an adjunct. And we talk about, you talk about functional medicine. Some people talk about Chinese medicine as alternative medicine, but I think we're on the same page that it's integrative medicine.

That we need to, I tell every single patient you've got to put your team together. I am not your ophthalmologist. I am not your neurologist. I am not your naturopath.

I am not your Alexander teacher. You need to put your team together. And when you put your team together, then that's where you have discernment and inquiry.

And as you're doing this summit, what's the core is the curiosity, the inquiry, and knowledge is power. And by giving people more knowledge, then they can become the people who transform their own health.

I love what you said, Dr. Grossman, about putting your team together. Because it's not that one modality of care is going to substitute for everything else.

It's really doing it together. So yes, you can follow the traditional recommendations, whether it be medications or injections, if you really need them, injections into the eye for something like macular degeneration.

In parallel with that, you can still do all of these other approaches, whether it be traditional Chinese medicine combined with acupuncture, whether it be nutrition, whether it be other types of integrative care methods, light therapy, photobiomodulation, that's coming up.

and it's getting a lot of attention these days for overall health, but also for eye health. So really you have to find the providers that are most in line with your way of thinking and who really resonate with you and build your team that way.

Who do you connect with? Who is listening to you and your complaints and build that team. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the acupuncture.

Can you just walk us through what's a typical regimen for someone? Let's say they're coming to see you for glaucoma. open-angle glaucoma, let's say. How often do they need to get acupuncture?

What is the duration? And also, how soon before you can start to see some changes or results from the treatment that you're providing? That's a very interesting question.

And I just wanted to add to it. Two years ago, I spent some time in India visiting the eye hospitals and also integrating Ayurvedic medicine, which I don't consider myself an expert in.

But again, again, a one that looks at the patterns behind it. Now, in Chinese medicine, again, the answer to almost every question that I do is yes and no.

Some people come in and when I check all the meridians, I check pulses, I check tongue, I check all the different points on their bodies, to see with applied kinesiology and muscle testing, to see if there's any weaknesses in the circulation.

So if somebody comes in and I say, hey, you're pretty healthy. I just had a 92-year-old with macular degeneration, but she is one of the healthiest people in my office.

So I only see her once every four to six weeks. I send her back to her retinal specialist and we're monitoring her with the OCT and the scans. But going back to your question with glaucoma, when I work with somebody with glaucoma, I always have to make sure that they see a glaucoma specialist so that they're really looking at it from the Western approach.

But like you as a functional medicine and a neuro-ophthalmologist, what we're offering is other things in the toolkit. So it's, yeah, and this is my problem.

I'm just getting a little excited here. The issue with Western medicine is, again, we said the X goes Y, but let's take a glaucoma, for example, because this is a pet peeve of mine because I went into eye care because my grandmother went blind from glaucoma and I took care for growing up.

Acupuncture for Glaucoma and Vision Support

And in fact, I did a whole article for the Townsend letter on an integrative approach to glaucoma. But think about glaucoma as an eye doctor. The only thing we have are drugs or surgery to lower the eye pressure.

Now, is that important? Yes, it's very important. But it's not a disease, a disease of eye pressure. it's a disease of the optic nerve. It's how the optic nerve is getting affected.

And we all know the optic nerve is related to the brain and the visual pathway. So if you have glaucoma, and let's say normal pressure is 10 to 22, and we know as your other doctors will talk about, we're integrating corneal thickness or whatever, but we wanna see the cupping and the vulnerability with the OCT testing.

Now, all we have as optometrist or ophthalmologist, again, is drugs or surgery to lower the pressure, which is important. And we can do that with herbs and acupuncture, too, because it's usually due, there's a connection between the heart and circulation and the eyes.

But wouldn't it make sense to build up the wall? to make the wall stronger? Can we do neuroprotection? Can we do things on neuroprotection to make the optic nerve stronger?

So not only are we lowering the pressure, we're making the nerve stronger, so we're working on it on both ends. Why is the pressure build up or why is there a vulnerability?

Were they born that way? And especially today with lion's mane mushrooms, great for neuroprotection. So what quiaflopoic acid. And again, the inflammation type of thing.

But inflammation can be worked with acupuncture, circulation. Why is the pressure getting built up? Why is there a vulnerability? Yeah, no, I hear exactly what you're saying.

And I'm in full agreement. It's just not enough to treat one thing. We really have to look at it again very holistically. Like, why is this happening?

As you mentioned, is it a circulation problem? Is it oxidative stress? Is it mitochondrial dysfunction? Is it a toxin that's affecting our body in a negative way?

So yes, you can do the traditional treatments, but really try to get a little bit deeper and understand why is the process happening. I love so much of what you've said, Dr.

Grossman. Now I wanted to ask you a little bit about the herbs or other botanical products that you may use in traditional Chinese medicine. Are there specific ones you recommend for specific types of complaints?

Like, for example, if someone's developing a cataract and they want to take an herbal supplement, do you have recommendations based off of disease processes or is it, again, based off of an individual's imbalances that they may be having?

both. Okay, so what happened was years ago when I was in acupuncture school, I scoured the literature on everything on vision and Chinese medicine. And as there's not too many people crazy enough to go to you, because I see your curiosity and your inquiry, you studied neuroophthalmology and then you studied functional medicine.

So I said not too many people like, oh, yeah, I already paid off my loans. Now I'm going to go to school for three to four more years and study acupuncture.

So what happened was they would say in Chinese medicine, glaucoma. But we know there's lots of different kinds of glaucoma. Cataracts. We know there's six different kinds of cataracts.

Macular degeneration. So what I did is that I put together some basic constitutional formulas on herbal things. And basically, let's say for glaucoma.

Since glaucoma, if the pressure is a little higher, is usually due to liver energy rising. So it's built up and we call liver key stagnation. The energy is stuck, so the pressure goes up.

So one of the beautiful formulas in Chinese medicine is called buplerium and P&E combination. The English translation for that is relaxed wanderer. And all the studies have shown that stress, it can affect eye pressure.

So relax wanderer, bupilar and peony combination is one of my core herbal formulas for glaucoma. So what I did is I took that formula and then I added some other herbs to it, which bring the energies to the eyes.

One of my favorites is licey berries, goji berries, wolfberry, which those are all the same, chrysanthemum. And of course, we all know about bilberry and ginkgo biloba, which increases the ocular circulation, especially to the optic nerve.

Herbal Formulas and At-Home Eye Care

But we got to be a little careful if we're going to add the ginkgo biloba, because if they're on blood thinners, then we don't want to thin the blood.

This is where it gets individualized. So I look at glaucoma in most cases as a wood element issue, and I will add and do a herbal formula for that. The other one, let's say in macular degeneration, I look at it more of an earth element issue where because it's very related, because macular degeneration is one of the only, not only, but it has been shown to be a nutritionally responsive condition.

I mean, as long as like 1970s, Joanna Senden at Harvard was talking about lutein and zeaxanthin helping the macula. So since it's nutritionally related, earth element has to do with the stomach and the spleen.

And it's about digestion. It's how the drusen are getting rid of the toxic products. So I'm really looking at an earth element. And then in earth element herbal formula, the core one that I recommend is either Gandameria and Gandamerian astragalus combination or ginseng astragalus combination.

And again, I added the lysis, the chrysanthemum. I added some other herbs to it, and then I called it retinal support. And then it depends on the condition.

But herbal medicine, again, that has to be a very powerful adjunct to the eye care toolkit for many of these eye conditions. Dr. Grossman, what you've shared has been so fascinating.

I could spend hours talking to you about this because we're in complete alignment about combining our approaches with the traditional methods. If someone were to integrate traditional Chinese medicine into their eye care, you know, as a patient, let's say they're having some vision problems, whatever it may be, do you have any simple tips for them?

I know some of these things like the supplements, the formulations need to be custom recommended, not something that people should do DIY, but Is there anything people could do at home on their own from a traditional Chinese medicine perspective to support their vision health?

Yeah, one of the beautiful things that they could do, and they teach this in China in the school system, is Chinese acupressure. You get all these points, bladder one, gallbladder one, and stomach one, and triple burn at 23. And I have all these eye massage points, and I have videos of these on my website that people can have.

But a really cool thing that people can do that really feels fantastic is they can just go and get in one of those warming eye masks whether they use it put warm compresses in a let's say in chamomile tea clean compress in boiled water because chamomile is a muscle relaxant or they for those of you who do use microwaves, they can microwave this eye mask, and that'll keep moist heat all on these acupressure points.

So it'll increase the circulation. It's, oh my God, it's like getting one of those towels in a Japanese restaurant, but it doesn't lose its heat. So right there, you are doing preventative medicine and increasing circulation around your eyes.

And that's a very powerful way. hips. Palming, which is one of the Bates methods, which one of your teachers is going to teach, and you warm up your hands, you put it, you have a little cup here and you go like this, but you know what point is right in the middle?

Dr. Banach, I like it when it's crossed, okay? Okay. Yeah. It doesn't matter which way, but a little cup that you see right here, this point, pericardium eight, heart protector.

It's like giving yourself reiki. So you're getting healing energy. You're doing Chinese medicine and Bates method together. I love that. It's so interesting that you're linking this back to Chinese medicine because everything you've mentioned, the self acupressure, the warm compresses, the palming, I recommend it to my patients, but from a different perspective, from more of a mechanical perspective or loosening the oils and the oil glands perspective, but you're connecting it to other parts of the body, which is so important.

I just love this.

Where to Learn More and Closing Remarks

And again, we could talk for hours about some of these aspects, and maybe we'll talk offline. But I wanted to thank you, Dr. Grossman, for sharing all of your amazing knowledge and expertise in the iHealth Summit.

Really, I'm sure people will be, their eyes will be open to some of these approaches, and hopefully they'll seek out providers on their own or perhaps come to see you.

How can people learn more from you, whether it's taking one of your courses or watching your videos? How can they connect with you? I don't do tumor bill on my website, naturaleyecare.com.

I also, it's probably about six or 800 pages of research, has free eye exercises. They could also contact me directly at drgroceman2020 at gmail.com if they have any questions.

when you want to interest in the consultation. And I am doing some online classes through Kripalo Yoga Center and Omega Institute. I love that facility.

I've been there. It's amazing. Yeah. So I've been teaching there for over 20 years and Omega Institute, maybe we'll eventually do something together. Thank you for your participation.

I'm sure you'll be, again, impacting the lives of so many thousands of people by sharing expertise. And our goal is all the same. It's to elevate eye health, to make it a priority, and to use various different approaches to support your vision.

And so thank you again, Dr. Grossman, for joining us. And we will include all of those links that you mentioned so anyone can reach out to Dr. Grossman and access some of his materials.

I really strongly encourage you to do that. Again, thank you so much for being a guest on the iHealth Summit. Okay, much appreciation. Thank you. Thank you for tuning in to the IQ Podcast.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode and learned something new to help you boost your IQ. Leave us a review and share the podcast with your family and friends.

Stay connected with me for more eye-opening insights on eye health, nutrition, and lifestyle. Until next time, keep your vision clear and your IQ sharp.